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ABSTRACT

Basing his discussion on an earlier paper Dr. Charles J. Erasmus ("Community Development and the Encogido Syndrome"), the author argues that community development should be defined in a more restricted fashion than has been done; that the techniques and limitations of the community development worker should be more clearly recognized; that the necessity for the community development worker turning to technical experts for certain kinds of specialized help be admitted; that the community development worker accept the responsibility to organize the unorganized, to transfer the decision-making process to the community, and to leave when he has done this and not become a permanent fixture in the client community. Community development is not something which a worker does, but rather a process which a worker helps to bring about. To be successful community development must become an interdisciplinary approach not only in its implementation but also in its theoretical formulation. (MF)

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TOWARD A MORE RESTRICTED DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

James R. Whitford

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JAMES R. WHITFORD

Recently Dr. Chas J. Erasmus published a paper entitled "Community Development and the Encogido Syndrome".[1] That paper sought to explore the form, the content and the goals of community development and "to raise the question of why this movement has not lived up to expectations".

In the present paper it is my intention to respond to some of the issues raised by the Erasmus paper and to propose a more restricted definition for the term "Community Development".

To begin, perhaps I should explain that my personal experience in community development has all been on the Canadian scene: three and a half years as a community development field worker in Grand Rapids, Manitoba and five years as Co-ordinator of the Alberta program.

Furthermore, in order that some of the bases from which I speak may be made clear it may be worthwhile listing some of the salient features of community development in Canada at the beginning of our discussion.

I. Canadian community development has historically concerned itself with pockets of poverty in the midst of affluence. This may have involved an urban renewal area, an Indian reserve or a "poor" rural district. The important facts to remember are that community development in Canada is concerned with poverty and that poverty is not considered a normal condition for Canadians.

II. Sometimes the community development effort in Canada is aimed at an ethnic minority which is poor such as the Negro in Halifax or the Indian and Metis of the West.

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Sometimes it is aimed at an ethnic majority such as the French in Montreal. Less often community development is simply directed to a lower socio-economic group in a specific geographic area such as the people in the urban renewal district (Boyle Street) of Edmonton. Regardless of this accent on ethnicity it should be remembered that the fact of "poverty" is primary in determining where a community development project will be initiated.

III. Another significant fact, especially in light of certain comments by du Sautoy, is that Canada (like the United States) has a potentially large number of academically well trained workers available to work with a relatively small client population. You may remember that du Sautoy wrote:[2]

> "In many of the less-developed countries there is no real place for the university graduate in the village itself."

And again:

> "The village level worker should have sufficient education to understand new ideas, but not so much that his ability to communicate these ideas in a simple and understandable fashion may be impaired."

I do agree with du Sautoy that in some less-developed countries the placing of university trained people into villages may be a misuse of scarce resources but this is not, presently at least, a problem we in Canada must face. In response to du Sautoy's reasoning I would also like to add that inability to communicate is not a function of too much education but of too little education of the right kind.

IV. As is the case in most places, there is a great deal of confusion as to the definition of community development and, therefore, people involved in a very wide range of activities are all characterized as "doing" community development.

V. I would agree with Erasmus that:

> "At both the national and international levels, community development is used as a pacifier in the hopes of avoiding disagreeable agitation."

In Canada, while there is much community development work being done which strongly expresses the "system-maintenance proclivities" described by Erasmus, there

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also are, or have been, good examples of community development, in the sense in which that term is understood in this paper, which are or were not system-maintaining. (Examples include: Alberta program from 1964 to the end of 1967; Indian Affairs Branch program for a few months; Manitoba program in 1961 and 1962; Animation Sociale in Montreal today.)

Problem Areas

I shall refer to point V later in the paper but just now let us return to point IV. One of the major problems faced by serious students of Community Development or by critics who wish seriously to become knowledgeable about the community development process and contribute critically to that process is the "conceptual confusion" permeating the whole field. The confusion is so serious that both theoreticians and practitioners have from time to time seriously suggested dropping the name altogether or at least changing it to something more meaningful.[3]

This conceptual confusion undoubtedly arises from many small sources but also from three major ones:

A. Everyone who says he is doing community development is deemed to be doing community development;

B. Community development workers think they are generalists rather than specialists; and

C. Writers have attempted to include too much in their definition of community development.

A. Everyone wants to get into the act.

Because community development strikes responsive emotional as well as intellectual chords in many people, there is a tendency for people in related fields to think of themselves as community developers and even to refer to their work as community development. This is partially true because of the attractiveness of the helping role, partially because of the attraction of the traditionally free modus operandi of community development workers

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and partially because of the apparent overlap in their work and the work of the community development practitioner.

As an illustration of this point, I was interested to find gathered together at a "National Consultation on Training for Community Development" held at The Guild Inn, Scarborough, Ontarion in 1965, the following people:

Government administrators,
Agricultural extension workers,
University extension workers,
Rural development workers,
Professors of sociology,
Directors of community associations,
Directors of ethnic associations,
Department of Education youth representatives,
Co-operative developers,
Union education officers,
and others.

All of these people claimed to be, or were considered to be, involved in community development. In fact, as long as the fog is permitted to roll back and forth over the community development landscape and as long as boundaries are not drawn and signposts well marked then any alien can walk in without fear of detection and the results for community development will be the same. Community development will continue to be misrepresented by people who do not understand the process or techniques of community development but use the title because it is in fashion these days. The further result is that people like Erasmus can then condemn community development with its "anachronistic procedures" with absolute justification. Serious community development workers, for example, would join Erasmus in condemning the Venezuelan example he cited on page three but they hate to be tarred with the same brush just because some extension worker or co-operative developer or handicraft expert says he is doing community development.

B. The Amoeba Complex and Other Sources of Friction

An amoeba, when attracted by some likely particle, surrounds it and injests it. Community Development has done the same thing to many technical specialties and this

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amoeba complex from which many community development workers suffer, is one source of friction between them and other technical specialists.

The problem arises most commonly when people in the midst of an educational process are confronted with problems requiring technical expertise of some sort. The community development worker should, of course, help to bring the people and the "expert" together and assist in the conjoint learning situation (it will almost certainly be mutually rewarding to both people and expert) wherever and however possible. Too often, however, the community development worker falls prey to the easier (and perhaps more ego satisfying) temptation to assume the role of expert himself. This does two things, both of which are damaging to the client community: firstly, it limits the potential of the learning experience and secondly, it creates unnecessary dependence upon the worker.

Another problem and source of irritation arises out of a real problem of communication which many "experts" experience in attempting to provide information to non-specialists. The irritation may arise when the community development worker presumes to advise the specialist on how to express himself in ways which will be meaningful to his audience; it may also arise if the specialist refuses or is unable to communicate his thoughts clearly enough and the community development worker then feels that his work in preparing the way for this meeting has been wasted.

Another important source of frustration to the community development worker which has been reported from many parts of the world and which tends to cause friction between the community development worker and the technical specialists is the alleged inability or unwillingness of the specialist to consider variables outside the confines of his specialty. Thus the teacher teaches but lives in a social vacuum; [4] the medical team fails to recognize the force of social practice in providing for a healthier community [5] or the agronomist fails to include the taste factor in attempting to introduce new crops into a region.[6]

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In short, there were many reasons why community development workers and technical specialists found themselves in conflict and somewhere along the line community development workers began describing themselves as "generalists" as opposed to "specialists" and one cannot help but feel that a certain air of superiority may have crept into the ennunciation of the term.

This bit of self deception acted as a comfortable cover because at that time there were no degrees in community development and to cover their academic nakedness, the fig leaf, generalist, served very well. The term would have remained a harmless vanity if workers had not, on the one hand, forgotten their own specialist origins and, on the other hand, begun to assume they possessed technical expertise which in fact they did not possess. Their own area of specialty lay in the fields of communication, organization and motivation and if they are not specialists in one or more of these fields then they have no business in community development.

C. Definitions

The title of Hynam's recent paper, "Community Development, An Example of Conceptual Confusion", [7] characterizes the present state of affairs in community development very well. At the basis of this "conceptual confusion" lies the fact of our failure even to agree on a basic definition let alone our failure to agree on goals and methodology.

The failure to define the term community development is a complex phenomenon in itself.

1. Some definitions confuse a statement of goals or techniques with definition as in: "community development is self help" or "community development is democracy in action" which are definitions often bandied about in conference settings.

2. Some definitions are so inclusive that they in fact say nothing as with Batten in: "community development is any action taken by any agency primarily designed to benefit the community". [8]

3. Some definitions contradict other definitions without specifically denying the validity of them or even recognizing their existence as in: "community development is a process of social action...." [9] as opposed to "community development is a movement designed to promote better living....."[10]

Furthermore, as there is no apparent agreement on what community development is all about, it is not surprizing to find that there is no agreement on the locus of the process. Do we, for example, obtain our clearest understanding of the concept , community development, by viewing it as a movement of international proportions or as a process in a community setting? Looked at another way, is community development something that a professional change agent does or is it something that people in a community experience, or both?

Meo Periculo

In the past few pages I have attempted to outline the major theoretical problems besetting community development at the present time. It seems clear to me that these three problem areas alone provide a sufficient answer to "the question of why this movement has not lived up to expectations". There are many other significant problems in the field of community development, especially those relating to its implementation, however, limitations of time and space require that these considerations be left to another time. In the remainder of this paper I wish to pursue two courses:

1. I will propose yet another definition; and

2. In the light of that definition I will discuss the role of the community development worker.

The Definition

I believe community development is an educational-motivational process by which people, in a community setting, become more effective in their public relationships.

There are, in this definition, a few points which need to be emphasized:

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(a) The locus of the process lies in the people in a community.

(b) The nature of the process is both educational and motivational in character and implies increased sensitivity, awareness, knowledge, skills and self confidence of the consumer population.

(c) The use of the word "effective" here refers, on the one hand, to the educational-motivational increment and on the other hand, it refers to increased participation (action) in events because one must participate in order to be effective in public relationships.

(d) By public relationships I refer to that broad spectrum of economic, political and social relationships which might be subsumed under the heading of "The Social System" in the Parsonian sense which makes both the individual-social distintion and the social system-culture distinction. [11]

(e) By "community setting" I refer to any type of community where the process can occur. Remember that the locus of the community development process is stated to be in the people in a community setting. Thus a community development worker could confine his efforts to a geographically defined community (i.e. a village or an urban neighborhood) or to a socially defined group (i.e. an ethnic or socio-economic group) within a more complex social environment.

One will note the similarity between the definition just proposed and that proposed by Biddle and Biddle: [12]

> Community development is a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world."

Both of these definitions seek to delineate a relatively narrow subject matter especially when compared with the rather grandiose broad-brush picture painted by A. K. Davis wherein he equates community development with certain major themes in world history: [13]

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> "By the latter term I mean the movement of a population toward higher material levels of living and toward the institutional patterns associated with urban-industrial society, whether of the capitalist or communist variation."

It is hoped that by restricting the definition as we have proposed we may be laying a firmer foundation for community development as a functional discipline. It is my contention that many critics misdirect their criticisms and many workers misdirect their energies precisely because there is either so little direction or such erroneous direction given to workers by definitions of, or within, the discipline. For example, aside from encouraging people to conform to the socio-economic system, "whether of the capitalist or communist variation", what would a community development worker do if community development were understood in Davis' terms?

The "material goals" exponents of community development tell us clearly what a worker would do': he would encourage people in: [14]

> ".....communal effort for material objectives - better methods of cultivation, a new school room, a road or a bridge - aimed at raising the standard of living."

Surely R. W. Poston writing seventeen years ago supplied "the reproof valiant" to that concept: [15]

> "All over the world American foreign aid has focused on the building of roads, dams, irrigation systems, compost pits, latrines, houses, water lines, health centres, bath houses, schools, and every other kind of physical improvement that can be imagined. It has built everything but communities and democratic societies. And while all this building has been going on - a job which could have been better accomplished by battalions of Seabees - while the flow of money has increased, the world climate for freedom has steadily deteriorated, and the forces of social unrest and regimentation have moved forward."

Finally, we also know what a community development worker would do if Batten's previously quoted definition were accepted: he could do almost anything.

The Worker, Who Is He and What Does He Do?

Perhaps at this point and in the light of our more restricted definition of community development we should turn our attention to the community development worker. Just what is it that he does and what is the set from which he operates?

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Let us begin by searching for clues in the genesis of various community development programs. First of all, if there were no underdeveloped countries, no relatively poor people; if there were no culturally deprived and no politically powerless people; there would likely be no community development. Community development then relates somehow to disparities.

Disparity itself, however, is not the problem. There are many examples of hierarchically organized, or stratified, societies which were completely viable because they were buttressed by an explanatory and/or sustaining value system. The present age, however, is characterized by rapidly changing values and this is another clue. Community development relates to a world of disparities in which basic value systems are being challenged or completely discarded.

Community development became important in a "global village" where disparity was increasingly visible and values were crowded into coruscating juxtaposition resulting in conflict.

The core of the community development workers interests then lies in the relationships between groups of people representing apparently distinct and opposing values, ideas and attainments.

It is this relationship, between the powerful and the powerless, the haves and the have-nots, the poor (in the sociological and psychological senses as well as the economic sense) and the non-poor, to which community development addresses itself.

With this discussion and our definition in mind let us now list and discuss six things which a community development worker must do:

Communicate,
Organize,
Create learning situations,
Motivate,
Encourage local leadership and followership,
Phase out.

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1. Communicate

The community development worker must establish and maintain communication with all the members of the community to which he has been assigned. By "Communicate" in this context I mean that the worker must become knowledgeable about the social structure and its functioning, the values held and by whom, the economic and the human resources of the community, the problems as seen by different individuals and groups. In other words he must know the crucial relationships and the terminology used to symbolize these relationships.

The other side of the communication coin is that he must make himself and his motives understood, to the degree that is possible, by members of the community. To that end he must become predictable for he will be seen as a model and will, therefore, communicate as much by the way he operates as by the things he says.

2. Organize

The community development worker must organize the unorganized. The purpose of the organization is to facilitate the educational process, to reinforce the motivations assumed by the in-group and to serve as a power base which stands structurally in opposition to other formally or informally organized power structures.

Does this indicate that the community development worker spends all of his time with "the poor"? The direct answer to that question is "No" as we shall see in the next section, however, much of the workers time will be spent helping "the poor" to do things which the non-poor learned to do long ago. The poor need to organize themselves and their thoughts, they need to learn to express themselves clearly, they need to understand the mechanisms of our society and they must become confident of attaining realistic goals despite years of continued frustration in the past. For the attainment of these objectives the community development worker will appear to spend a disproportionate amount of time with one segment of the community and this itself will cause friction.

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One further word about organizing; it must never be done in a vacuum. As Saul Alinsky keeps insisting, "people are organized around issues" of importance to them - around their felt needs.

Despite a generally good treatment of his subject Erasmus has obviously been exposed to some very shoddy work being done in the name of community development and it shows on page two of his article where he deals with "felt needs". He asks:

> ".....whose felt needs are involved if those supposedly "felt" by the subjects need developers to help make them felt?" [16]

Such a question is either a deliberate attempt to misconstrue the role of the worker (developer) or it reveals ignorance of the matter at hand.

"Felt needs" exist in the community long before the community development worker (presumably we all have "felt needs") and there are techniques for eliciting them and other techniques for testing their intensity. What might be called "high intensity felt needs" are picked up by the community development worker and thrown back into the local organization for further refining and planning; these become the issues.

The implication that the community development worker plants the "felt needs" is serious, although I have seen it done, and is grounds for divorce from any reputable community development agency.

The term "felt needs" is used in this paper in precisely the same way it is used by Goodenough: [17]

> "In order to keep the different perspectives on needs clearly distinct we shall use the expression "felt need" to refer only to a client's need as he perceives it, whether it is realistic or not."

"Felt needs" in that sense are obviously not the foundation blocks for weighty projects; they are, however, useful as indicators in determining how the citizen sees his own present condition.

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3. Create Learning Situations

Whenever people have a problem, lack of resolution may normally be attributed to:

(a) lack of concern,

(b) lack of an answer,

(c) lack of a practical plan of action which may be implemented to solve the problem.

If people have delineated a problem area then it is unlikely that they are totally lacking in concern. They may, however, lack the degree of concern concomitant to the degree of effort required to solve their problem. For example, I would like to play the clarinet and am concerned about my lack of musical ability. The fact is that I am not concerned enough to do anything about this problem and am not likely to take up the clarinet until conditions, externally, or internally, change and I become relatively more highly motivated musically.

If people lack answers to their social problems, or knowing the answer, lack the skill or knowledge or self-confidence to try to solve the problems then the role of the community development worker is to help to supply that skill, knowledge and self-confidence. The community development worker will create learning situations of varying degrees of complexity to meet the actual needs of people. For example, he might show people how to write a letter but he will not become the community amanuesis or if people want to learn how to shear sheep he might suggest that they invite a local sheep farmer or extension worker from the university to instruct in sheep shearing.

One important rule for the worker to remember is that every time he does something which the citizens could have done themselves he has robbed them of a learning experience and to that degree has retarded the community development process.

One essential aspect of the educational part of the process lies in the concept of "Universalization" as outlined by Michel Blondin: [18]

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> "There cannot be an self-help projects without there being at the same time an increasingly comprehensive awareness of the situation of those who take part in it."

and

> "It is by stressing this awakening of an awareness that will become progressively broader that it will become acceptable to question the very foundations of our society, to examine them from different angles and to question them again to the extent that it is necessary."

In other words an essential part of the community development process is the increasingly comprehensive understanding of our social system beginning with a clarification of the local situation but broadening to include any areas into which the citizens may be lead by their interests and needs.

As part of the "clarification of the local situation" all segments of the community should be encouraged to become more knowledgeable about their fellow citizens and to try to hear and to see their community from a new and more inclusive perspective.

4. Motivate

Aside from the motivational aspects of the educational process which goes on in the community there are two crucial points where the community development worker (animateur) intervenes directly in community affairs in an attempt to motivate the people.

The first point comes early, when the worker is attempting to instil hope in the citizens that if they will simply try once more, using new techniques and strategies, they may be able to solve some of the problems that concern them. The second point comes when it is time for the people to translate their new found skills into action.

In both instances there are great psychological barriers to be overcome which need to be studied more thoroughly but seem to revolve around what may be called the costs of commitment. One of the things which the anthropologists have taught us is to recognize the intricate pattern of social interrelationships in a community by which the physical and social needs of people are divided up in a disproportionate but finely balanced manner. To begin talking about changing the proportions threatens the whole socio-economic

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balance and brings quick responses which attempt to retain or restore the status quo.

Social action, therefore, is not a matter to be considered lightly or played with by dilettantes as there is an ethical question of considerable magnitude involved. The same question is involved of course in rejecting a course of social action.

Just one or two additional comments about motivation. One of the reasons why the poor, (as defined above - see page 10) need an organization, is to help them face the psychological and social pressures which they will meet in trying to change their conditions. There seems to be a safety-in-numbers or a corporate-anonymity-factor which helps them adjust to the "costs of commitment".

Finally, on page 10 I said"

> "The core of the community development worker's interests, then, lies in the relationships between groups of people representing apparently distinct and opposing values, ideas and attainments."

The point is that many communities are split over"apparently opposing values" etc. Happily, opposing groups in a community may be brought together to consider certain shared super-ordinate goals such as a desire for a peaceful community or better educational facilities or greater local economic growth potential or any one of a number of other goals which may be seen as worthy of co-operative effort. It will, however, be a major motivational accomplishment to get such opposing groups to even sit together and discuss these matters.

5. Encourage Local Leadership and Followership

Erasmus seems to dismiss the idea of developing local "lay" leaders or professional change agents of rural origin because: [19]

> "Such trained leaders and agents seem always to feel the best of all possible needs as defined by advocates of community development."

If Erasmus' observations are correct then we may either assume that we have finally found some infallible community development directors or we must interpret such

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blind followership by the trained leaders as a danger signal requiring us to look more closely at the situation.

In Alberta our experience has been that there is little problem, relatively speaking, in training local leaders to take over specific responsibilities for economic projects or community associations and to act as travel organizers, communications facilitators and spokesmen for their community or their project to the outside world. We have had nearly total failure in attempting to place local people as village level workers or "catalysts" because in attempting to follow the procedures arising out of our definition of community development they were subjected to intolerable social pressures with a result that they either broke down or had to quit.

It is, therefore, my contention that local leadership can be trained but as an aid to the trained leader there should also be attempts made to encourage and train people, if training is possible, in followership. I am not sure whether or not the "invidious sanction", which Erasmus describes in detail, [20] is a universal but it is certainly very extensively found and is a major barrier to development programs.

There is another reason why local leaders need to be trained and that is to make it possible for them to carry on the projects which have arisen and will continue to arise out of their community development experience. This is particularly important because the community development worker must not become the focus of a new dependency pattern.

6. Phase Out

One of the most important things that the community development worker will do is to leave the community to which he has been assigned. The understanding that the worker is not to become a permanent part of the community must be built into the community development project from the beginning and made explicit to the client community from the start. The reason is obvious: it is the most effective means of

ensuring that the community does not develop a permanent dependence upon the worker. They know from the beginning that he is a temporary addition to their pool of knowledge and skills and that they should, therefore, use him as a resource but that in the long run the citizens of the community must depend upon themselves. It, therefore, behooves them to make themselves more effective by learning as much from and with their community resource person, the community development worker, for the short period of time he will be available.

The six "musts" in our above list are not meant to complete the role definition of a community development worker but rather to identify activities in which all workers will become involved regardless of the situations in which they find themselves. Why must they do these things? Why are they necessary? The answer to these questions rises out of a community development workers mental set - from the way he sees his society. Nelson, Ramsay and Verner, in discussing approaches to community development have said: [21]

> "In the complex societies of today, non-democratic traditions have so engulfed the social processes that it is necessary for participants to learn new ways of reinstituting this essentially democratic process of achieving group goals. This is the function of community development as an education-for-action process."

The community development worker unlike other students of man and his institutions not only sees the problems of society but feels compelled to do something about them. He is not simply a dispassionate observer of social affairs but also a committed person who does get involved in value-laden issues. Because he gets involved in such issues he is considered a disturbing influence. As Galbraith has pointed out: [22]

> "These are the days when men of all social disciplines and all political faiths seek the comfortable and the accepted; when the man of controversy is looked upon as a disturbing influence; when originality is taken to be a mark of instability; and when, in minor modification of the scriptural parable, the bland lead the bland."

Good community development workers become men of controversy because their

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message is not comfortable. When a good community development worker looks at a community he sees, not only the disparities, and the injustices and the myriad social evils which affect it but also he sees the potential for improvement and learning and co-operation and he cannot in conscience remain aloof from the challenge to affect improvement.

If his intervention results in conflict for others and social isolation for himself he is sustained by his faith in humanistic, participatory democracy as a goal and the efficacy of the community development process as a means to achieve that end. If, in fact, the involvement of more and more people in the making of decisions that influence their own lives is not a viable concept then the community development worker is doomed to disappointment in support of a noble but fatuous cause. The question of "democracy" in terms understood by community development workers and high school valedictorians is one which stands near the centre of the political philosophy stage and requires practical rather than hypothetical answers soon.

CONCLUSIONS

From the definition given in this paper and the description of the essential work of the community development worker it is clear that community development is not something which a worker does. It is rather a process which a worker helps to bring about. Because of the complexity of the economic-political-psychological-social matrix within which the process occurs it is obvious that many skills, much knowledge and great sensitivity is required of an effective worker. It is also obvious that many disciplines have insights to offer which will help to bring the process to fruition. This being the case it would seem a point of good judgement that any agency working in the community development field should choose their staff members eclectically and create training programs for staff and others which will serve to broaden their

skills and sensitivities rather than reducing them.

My plea then is that community development will become a truly interdisciplinary discipline not only in its implementation but also in its theoretical formulation. Despite community development's amoeba complex with regard to technical specialties we have been loth to approach too closely to the shores of Academia fearing, no doubt, that the natives may be unfriendly. However, community development needs help in clarifying issues, providing the intellectual tools with which to do a better job and most of all, community development needs (we may not want) the critical appraisal of observers such as Erasmus whom we can disparage if we like but whom we cannot ignore except to our own disadvantage.

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